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ABSTRACT

The French-speaking population of Quebec constitutes a small, isolated island in the midst of an English-speaking world. The cultural survival of its six to seven million inhabitants depends upon the quality of its educational system. In the last few years, however, the balance of this system has been upset by a number of factors and the University of Montreal, where teachers receive their training, has been vigorously criticized by the teaching profession. Between 1980 and 1981, an evaluation was made of the University's pre-school/primary program; both professors and students judged it inadequate, although their reasons were different. Further analysis of the situation has led faculty to attempt reforms that accentuate the professional aspect of the program and allow students to work out their own training program. Under the proposed reform, future teachers will develop skills in a certain number of subjects, and their progress will be systematically evaluated. Also, individualized specialization profiles will be added to the basic structure of the program. (SP)

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THE TRAINING OF FRENCH-CANADIAN TEACHERS: VERSATILITY AND ELEMENTARY TEACHER TRAINING

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THE TRAINING OF FRENCH-CANADIAN TEACHERS: VERSATILITY AND ELEMENTARY TEACHER TRAINING

The present document constitutes a synthesis of the progress and thought which has marked the formulation of a project for reforming the pre-school and elementary level teacher training B.A. program at the University of Montreal. Initiated in a climate in which pressures both without and within were considerable, this had to be an in-depth undertaking. Because of this, a study had to be made of the general context in which teacher training in Quebec is carried on. The resulting analysis identified a key concept: versatility. It is therefore to the emergence of this concept and its repercussions on the reform project that we shall mainly address ourselves in what might be called a case study set in a wider context.

THE FRENCH POPULATION OF QUEBEC AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The French-speaking population constitutes a small, isolated island in the midst of an English-speaking world. The cultural survival of these five million inhabitants (out of a total population of 6 million) is directly dependent on the quality of their educational system. A very considerable collective effort was made in the '60s, as the consequence of a commission of inquiry: among other innovations, this resulted in the setting up of a ministry of education, substantial changes at all levels of schooling from pre-school up to university, the creation of a new French-speaking university, the Université du Québec, with its four constituent parts, one in Montreal to

serve this densely populated area and three others in areas further away from the large urban centres. Moreover, this wide-ranging reform of the Quebec educational system gave the universities responsibility for the basic training and further professional development of teachers. Since the 60s, therefore, French-speaking Quebec has had nine teacher training centres in the universities, including two in Montreal.

These changes, which came in the wake of Quebec's "Quiet Revolution", although disturbing from more than one point of view, brought obvious improvements, especially as regards greater democratization of educational services and a collective rise in the standard of living of Quebec's French-speaking population. A certain stability was in the making.

Social Upheaval and the Need for Change

This stability was short-lived, however. Indeed, in the last few years, the balance of this system has been upset by a number of factors: first of all, a sharp decline in the birth rate. This has led to the closing of schools with its accompanying problems (reallocation of students, transport, disintegration of communities) and a surplus of teachers which is also causing problems such as the ageing of the teaching personnel and their reassignment to tasks for which they have neither the necessary training nor experience.

Demographic forecasts are now slightly more optimistic: while this increase will eventually wipe out the surplus of teachers, it may be asked

whether it will help to counterbalance the ageing of the teaching personnel. All the more so since the economic crisis has also accentuated the problem, leading to staff reductions and a harder line taken by the government in its capacity as employer in bargaining with the unions.

The situation raises the vital question of a versatile approach to teacher training, formalized to permit a certain professional mobility. Such an approach thus seems desirable with regard to specialties and disciplines for secondary-school teachers, and with regard to levels (pre-school, Elementary 1st and 2nd cycles and Secondary 1st cycle) for elementary school teachers. And insofar as the public schools will not be able, on a short- if not a long-term basis, to hire teacher training program graduates, a more generalist approach would also be desirable as regards other institutions and jobs for these graduates since they will have to exercise their skills in private schools, day-care centres, extra-mural activity centres, hospitals, etc.

Apart from these factors of the low birth rate, teacher surpluses, a redefinition of working conditions and the economic crisis, there is the added problem of the government's recent redefinition of its educational goals. These initiatives doubtless help to solve certain problems but they accentuate the imbalance while posing the question of versatility in teacher training, this time in terms of the abilities and skills required of teachers in carrying out their task.

In 1979, the Quebec Ministry of Education published its policy statement and plan of action for elementary and secondary education, following consultations which aroused great interest and considerable participation. Three aspects of this plan of action have repercussions on teachers' work and consequently on our training programs. The first concerns increased parent participation in school activities. Each school, i.e., administrators, teachers and parents, is invited to work out its own educational project, defining its goals and the appropriate means of attaining them based on common values or concerns. Teachers will therefore be required to develop skills as animators in their dealings with parents. The second aspect, and the one which is now most disturbing to teachers, concerns the integration of children with slight learning and adaptation problems into the regular classes. Since the '60s, these children have been placed (and at an increasing rate) in special classes under the care of special education specialists.

The third aspect is inherent in the Ministry's formulation of new syllabi for the various subjects taught. These syllabi try to establish a better balance between the acquisition of knowledge and basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic) and the overall development of the child from the intellectual, physical, emotional and social points of view. Teachers are thus called upon to become not only teaching specialists capable of considering all these factors, but educators as well. In addition, these programs open up new fields, especially that of technology. They also define certain goals, especially in French, for which preliminary consultations had

noted many comments evaluating the quality of children's written and oral French as deplorable.

Another project of the Ministry, still under study, although with no direct bearing on teacher training, is worth mentioning because of its strong emotional impact and the old conflicts it has awakened. This is a project for restructuring the school system. Among other things, it challenges the present division between the French Catholic and English Protestant sectors. The Anglophone minority in Quebec and the members of other ethnic groups ('Allophones') who have chosen to live in English in this English-speaking America, feel particularly threatened and fear the loss of their acquired rights in a French-speaking Quebec. Among the Francophones, it is mainly the decentralization aspect of the project, the new sharing of administrative and financial powers, which raises protest. The local administrations see part of their responsibilities (allocation and management of financial and human resources) and thus their powers, taken away from them in favour of the school councils. This is not without consequence for teacher training, since administrative and planning skills will henceforth be expected from teachers, even though these are responsibilities that they will have to share with the other parties concerned.

The Challenge of the Universities

These changes, certainly desirable and, on the whole, desired, are nonetheless far-reaching. They will affect the Quebec educational system for

at least the next twenty years. We have approached these changes in terms of versatility which seems to us the most appropriate for viewing the general context of elementary teacher training programs. But the task is proving difficult for the teacher training centres which have to meet the needs of the educational and school system. Having only been part of the universities for little more than ten years, their traditions are not yet firmly rooted. Nor have the universities, for their part, escaped the economic crisis: it is they who have incurred the largest budget cuts. While they receive 15% of the Ministry of Education's budget, they find themselves with 50% of its cuts. The more recent and developing faculties or departments are obviously the hardest hit.

The universities also have to cope with institutional constraints. Program planning must take place within the framework laid down by the Ministry of Education. Teacher training programs are 90 credit B.A. programs, completed in three years, full-time, at the rate of two semesters per annum. The Ministry's requirements stipulate that these programs must consist of a minimum of 45 credits of theoretical studies and of practical work of a psycho-pedagogical nature (pedagogical techniques, psychology, teaching methods of the subjects taught at the elementary level, practice teaching) and fixes minimum thresholds for each of these aspects.

Finally, the training centres must improve their image as regards their users: teachers receiving further professional training and future teachers. A wide-ranging socio-pedagogical study (9 vols.) published in 1980, analyzes

the results of a survey conducted in 1978 of Quebec's elementary and secondary teachers and shows their negative perception of the teacher training centres. The teachers place little value on their university training and professional development as a factor of professional success: 42% of respondents consider this factor important whereas 94%, for example, mention experience gained in the classroom. Indeed, the practice of their profession, their aptitudes, talents or natural gifts, their discussions with colleagues, and even their work experience in other fields are considered more important factors in the successful exercise of their profession. These findings are corroborated by the negative evaluation they make of their own training and professional development experience and their critical attitude towards the university.

Expectations of Teachers and Students

Teachers in Quebec, in spite of their negative perceptions of the university, do not question the pertinence of teacher training and professional development being dispensed by the universities. Only 8% of respondants believe that training should be the employer's responsibility, whereas 22% would leave it entirely to the university, the majority (70%) favouring closer collaboration between the university and the employer. They obviously consider their professional training inadequate. They want more emphasis on the practical aspect of the programs, closer contact with the schools, more links between theory and practice in the courses. This is confirmed by the results of other survey questionnaires administered to

students of different training centres, and the data of our own survey of our present and former students.

However, close study of the various questionnaires reveals a certain ambiguity. Speculating on an ideal program, a large majority (93%) of Quebec teachers recommend more practice and 75% want more alternation between training and teaching. Moreover, 70% want greater emphasis on psychological and socio-pedagogical training and 62% want more information on the main currents of educational thought. Practice seems an important but not exclusive goal. On the other hand, items indicated as important by respondents to the various questionnaires imply not only the acquisition of knowledge, particularly in special education, but also the development of personal qualities. With regard to questions aimed at evaluating the adequacy of their training in relation to certain abilities and acquisitions, the items considered inadequate by the great majority are, in order, relations with parents (67%), adjustment to pupils' socio-economic characteristics (62%), understanding of changes (61%), helping problem children (59%). These are items affected by the elements of the generalist approach mentioned above as regards the new abilities and skills required of teachers.

These consultations with the population concerned thus suggests greater emphasis for the teacher training programs on the professional aspect of the training and on the pursuit of a versatile approach. This is the challenge that the university training centres must meet to satisfy not only the needs of the Quebec educational system but also the expectations of teachers and

students. The University of Montreal has tried to meet the challenge and has set itself the task of developing a new training course for elementary teachers which will adequately confront these contextual constraints.

VERSATILITY AND THE TRAINING PROGRAM

The reform of the University of Montreal's pre-school and elementary education B.A. program is intended to ensure the professional competence of its graduates more effectively, with as much emphasis as possible on the generalist approach. The presentation of the context has enabled us to distinguish two levels at which this generalist approach should be applied. A first level proves rather formal: the ability to operate at more than one level (pre-school, 1st and 2nd cycles of the elementary course), and to work in environments other than the public school system. The second level is more fundamental, for it affects the abilities and skills expected of a competent teacher: the ability to foster not only the child's learning skills but also its overall development, the ability to integrate children with slight learning and adaptation problems, and animation and administrative skills in their relations with parents. The pursuit of versatility as an integrating objective, has become a source of inspiration for the eventual form the program will take.

This project for reforming the University of Montreal's pre-school and elementary program was seen mainly as a Faculty concern, with the

primary objective still remaining the rationalization of programs and resources, but also, at least partially, meeting the need for generalists. A study group thus brought together the pre-school/elementary, special education and secondary/college departments, all three involved in basic teacher training. The result was the development of a common core course taking up half the credits of the pre-school and special education B.A. programs as well as nearly three quarters of the secondary/college programs. This basic training, common to the three departments, was to promote certain forms of versatility. Its formalization with regard to teaching and specialty levels certainly remains relative within the framework of the 90 credits of a B.A. degree and a certification of 45 credits for students of the secondary and college program, but is nonetheless present on account of the common training. As to the more versatile approach to the teacher's classroom functions, this is incorporated in the core course although subordinated to the primary objective: to prepare students for teaching as effectively and economically as possible. The quest for versatility would thus have to be pursued beyond the student's basic training.

Core Course and Basic Competence

The reasoning behind the proposed reform postulated maximum effectiveness in the common core course so as to free as many credits as possible for complementary training. Two methods were favoured to achieve this effectiveness. The first consisted in basing the core course on an

explicit rationale and the second, in adapting its composition to a minimum perspective, in other words, a perspective addressing the essential aspects of a basic training.

The rationale was based on three elements. The first to be considered was the definition and weighting of six categories of syllabi*: 1) knowledge of the subject (child-pupil), 16%, 2) general pedagogical techniques, 12%, 3) knowledge of the subjects to be taught, 12%, 4) teaching methods for the subjects, 31%, 5) knowledge of the institutional aspects of education, 12%, 6) practice teaching, 17%, for a total of 51 credits. Note should be taken of the relative importance given to psycho-pedagogical aspects (45%). This shows a concern for training learning specialists and educators. These categories were very carefully defined so as to ensure that the syllabi concerned would be covered and to avoid overlapping between categories. The latter were chosen because they combine the training elements re ommended by the Quebec Ministry of Education and reflect the organization of the three programs now offered by the Faculty.

Secondly, the study group was concerned about the relationship between theory and practice which our consultations with the milieu had identified as the desirable focus for professional training. Thus, it was decided to draw on the practical credits reserved up to now for practice teaching. This decision was to ensure the identification of practical activities within the

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*See attached tables.

program and an increased place for them in the timetable. Moreover, distinctions were made between the more theoretical and more practical elements both within and between categories. Lastly, a systematic matching of theoretical and practical credits was devised to avoid falling into a new form of compartmentalization between theory and practice.

Thirdly, an important place has been reserved for the integration of children with slight learning problems in courses teaching their mother tongue and mathematics. This move is accompanied, moreover, by greater emphasis on differences between children provided by the courses and activities dealing with knowledge of the child. This aspect of the versatile and generalist approach, required by the Ministry of Education and the source of concern for teachers and students, called for particular attention.

As for the minimum perspective with regard to the composition of the core program, this took the form of trying to determine the minimum number of credits required in each of the six categories to satisfactorily cover the syllabi involved. The result was an enriched syllabus for each of the activities. Moreover, all these activities are subjected to the formulation of a detailed comprehensive syllabus. Thus, minimum coverage of a given field (knowledge or skills) will be easier to provide and coordination between the various subjects taught will be easier to achieve. Each syllabus must consequently include appropriate methods for evaluating the desired objectives.

Relative professional versatility is proposed by the common core course. It prepares students for teaching at more than one level (pre-school, Elementary 1st and 2nd cycles), for various groups of children including those with slight learning difficulties. Its concern is to train learning specialists capable of directing their interventions towards the child's overall development. It also provides, although partially, for developing the skills of animator and administrator required by the new teacher-parent relationships. However, the core program does not promote, at least explicitly, the training of educators able to work in environments other than the school, its primary objective being to ensure preparation for teaching.

Complementary Training and the Generalist Approach

The versatile approach adopted by the core course remains limited in that its field of exercise is limited to the school, and does not go much beyond that aspect. It was therefore important to make sure that, once the basic training was provided, the complementary credits should contribute to broadening the students' professional development.

This part of the reform project is not so advanced. Our efforts have mainly been concentrated on the core course for which possibilities for reflexion were greater because of the diversity not only of the objectives specific to each of the three departments involved but also of the means of attaining each of them. At the pre-school-elementary level, the desire for greater emphasis on versatility should, on the contrary, limit the range of

possibilities. The most stimulating hypothesis to date is that of the creation of a set of complementary modules of varying importance that students might choose according to their interests and needs.

Thus, modules would be offered which would enable students to complete the practical part of their training begun in the core course with respect either to the teaching methods of the various disciplines, to the integration of children with slight learning and adaptation problems, or to work with children of a particular age group (pre-school) etc. This practical training might take the form of practice teaching, teaching projects or practical work in the classes, in preparation for intervention in an environment other than the school (e.g. day-care centres, hospitals). Other modules would be based on the mastery of animation techniques, emphasis on administration in an educational context, or on particular approaches such as education through art, open teaching, etc. One module might be devoted to the question of educational research for which those wishing to proceed to postgraduate studies.

The versatile and generalist approach to teaching made necessary by the development of the Quebec educational system obviously cannot be ensured within the framework of the 90 B.A. credits. However, this module structure superimposed on the core course opens the way to possibilities for further professional development. Students and teachers wishing to become more effective generalists for the purpose of greater professional mobility or to progress in their field of educational activity, might register for 1st cycle

certificates (30 credits) combining several modules, or based on this model. On the other hand, it would certainly be desirable for the school to try to develop a more versatile approach within teams of teachers at the same school.

The particular socio-cultural status of the Quebec French-speaking community, a minority within English-speaking North America, makes versatility a key concept in our understanding of the Quebec educational system, and its consequences for teacher training. Indeed, since resources are limited, they must be put to the best possible use. The rather restricted definition that we have given to the concept of versatility, however, will doubtless prove surprising. Paradoxically, it excludes the cultural aspect or, more specifically, that of biculturalism although this is a characteristic of our life as Francophones in North America. Should we hope that the next move of the Quebec educational system might be towards greater receptivity to Anglophone culture? Might not some people then proclaim the beginning of a process of assimilation? The survival of the French presence in Quebec is largely explained by the existence of unilingual French schools. That is the choice of our society and is thus a political decision, and everything suggests that the transformation of our French schools into bilingual schools (English-French) is far from imminent. We believe our future is at stake; nonetheless, greater awareness of English culture as well as the teaching of English as a second language call for improvements to which an increasingly bicultural generalist approach on the part of Francophone teachers would undoubtedly contribute.

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TABLE I

Weighting of Syllabus Categories

Category	Total cred.	Distrib. by activ.	Syll.	No of compul. cr. Theoretical	No of compul. cr. Practical	No of opt. cr. Theoretical	No of opt. cr. Practical	Hrs.per Week
1. Child knowl.	8	4	-	2	-	1	1	5
		4	-	2	-	1	1	5
2. Subject (1) knowl.	6	2	-	2	-	-	-	2
		2	-	2	-	-	-	2
		2	-	-	-	2	-	2
3. General didactics	6	3	-	2	-	-	1	4
		3	-	2	-	-	1	4
4.[a] Subject (1) didactics	16	2	Reg. Fr.	1	1	-	-	3
		2	Sp. Fr.	1	1	-	-	3
		2	Integr. Fr.	-	1	-	1	3
		2	Reg. Maths	1	1	-	-	3
		2	Sp. Maths	1	1	-	-	3
		2	Integr. Maths	-	1	-	1	3
		2	Compl. Dis.I	-	-	1	1	3
		2	Compl. Dis.II	-	-	1	1	3
4.[b] Subject (2) didactics	7	2	Dis. I Reg.	1	1	-	-	3
		2	Dis. I Sp.	1	1	-	-	3
		3	Dis. II Int.	1	1	-	1	5
5. Instit. knowl.	6	4	-	2	-	2	-	4
		2	-	1	1	-	-	3
6. Practice teaching	9	1	-	-	1	-	-	2
		2	-	-	2	-	-	4
		6	-	-	6	-	-	12
TOTAL								
Pre. Elem. Sp.	51			19	16	8	8	64
Sec. Coll.	36			14	13	4	5	45

(1) Pre. Elem.-Sp. only (2) Sec. Coll. only

TABLE II

Distribution of Credits by Status

Section	Total	Compulsory	Optional	Theoretical	Practical
Pre.Elem.-Sp.	51	35	16	27	24
Sec. Coll.	36	27	9	18	18